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TAGS: MARR PGOV PREL PTER EAID MR
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: LAYERED SECURITY STRATEGY

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 500

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) The Way Forward: On September 2-3, Post hosted a Trans-Sahara Counter-terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) country-specific conference to develop a coordinated "hard" and "soft" counter-terrorism re-engagement strategy for FY09 and FY10. Conference participants included Country Team members, State Director for West African Affairs, AF/RSA, DS/ATA, as well as USAID, AFRICOM, Embassy Rabat LEGAT, and Bamako DCM. Sessions focused on the current hard and soft counter-terrorism and mil-to-mil environments and explored appropriate DoD, State and USAID programs in support of Post's Mission Strategic Plan (recently revised following the July 18 election and Christopher Leggett's murder, see reftel). The Mission outlines a "layered security strategy" that focuses U.S. counter-terrorism activities on bolstering Mauritanian capacity to interdict the "hard" threat posed by AQIM. These actions include "early warning" through ISR, maritime and border patrol support and/or training along Mauritania's border with Mali and, to a lesser degree, at its maritime borders with Morocco Sahara and Senegal. Mil-to-Mil engagement will focus on two of the three specialized military counter-terrorism units used to secure the "frontier towns" running from Zouerate in the north to Nema in the southeast. Law enforcement engagement will seek to build national police and judicial capacity in the capital and, later, in the provinces. USAID and DOD counter-extremism activities will focus on "prevention" in the areas of perceived radicalization in the Nouakchott to Kiffa access as well as DOD-funded "hearts and minds" initiatives in the "frontier towns." The USAID program will also explore 'reintegration' activities aimed at existing extremists already in detention.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

12. (C) Hard Counter-Terrorism Threat: With AQIM's increased presence in Northern Mali, the Leggett murder, information pointing to AQIM's intent to kidnap Americans, and the recent suicide bomber attack against French interests, the terrorist threat has taken immediate proportions. Hard CT cooperation will become a major area of interaction with Mauritanian authorities. The main threat

remains the possibility of attacks conducted by small, compartmented 2-3 people AQIM cells entering Mauritania from Mali -- a strategy used to carry out both the Leggett murder and the suicide bomber attack. Car bombs and suicide bomber attacks conducted in this fashion remain a possibility as well as kidnappings in outlying towns. The threat can only increase as AQIM senior leadership has expressed an interest in recruiting Mauritanians and conducting more attacks in the country. In the wake of the Leggett murder, the Mauritanian population as well as authorities have demonstrated a willingness to cooperate and security services have proven to be the US's best partners in the region. Nevertheless, capacity building among Mauritanian military to face the terrorist threat is still needed. A new deeper understanding of the threat has led Post to create a layered security strategy. The Mauritanian territory has been divided in four areas focusing on early warning systems, capacity building and counter-terrorism, counter-terrorism, and counter-extremism. Nouadhibou, the economic capital to the north, and Rosso, the border post to the south, are included with the border areas with Mali as the main focus of early-warning efforts to minimize the ease of cross-border threats (terrorism and well as drugs, weapons, and human trafficking). As the political capital and home to a quarter of Mauritanians, Nouakchott has become the main capacity building and a counter-terrorism focus area. The area from Zouerate to Nema, encompassing parts of the Tiris Zemour, Adrar, Tagant, Hodh El Gharbi and Hodh Ech Cargui, where AQIM can conduct hit-and-run operations, are main counter-terrorism focus areas along with Nouakchott proper. The Nouakchott suburbs and parts of the Trarza, Brakna and Assaba have become main counter-extremism focus areas given the relative strength of radical Islam in these regions.

13. (C) Soft Counter-Terrorism Threat: Ten years ago, Mauritians -- who practice the peaceful and tolerant Maliki rite -- would not have believed that radicalization and violent extremism could find followers within their society. The Aleg murders, the Lemgeity and Tourine attacks, the Leggett murder and the suicide bomber attack have dramatically changed Mauritanian perceptions of their society. The Aleg murders, conducted by Mauritians from middle class families, showed that radicalization is not directly tied to poverty but to a perceived lack of opportunity and that it also has a criminal component. President Aziz and Foreign Minister Mouknass have recognized the threat, which they describe as "a cancer" and "an embryonic threat." Despite the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat that suspended US development assistance, the Departments of State and Defense -- through Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE), Military Information Support Team (MIST) and Public Diplomacy (PD) -- have maintained some level of counter-extremism programs throughout the past year. CMSE has focused mostly on humanitarian projects to improve the lives of poor populations along the Road of Hope, including fire stations, schools, wells and bridges -- many of these projects were developed to support mayors opposed to the coup. MIST has concentrated on voter education programs and anti-radicalization youth programs in conjunction with mayors. The mission's PD program, established three years ago, has opened alumni resource centers and American Corners. While the "hard" terrorist threat posed by AQIM is immediate and urgent, the emerging radicalization trend is the greatest security threat over the long term. The "hard" threat lends itself to relatively quick and practical interventions, while the larger "soft" threat requires a patient strategy of behavior change.

14. (C) Mil-to-Mil: The Mauritanian military is aware of the terrorist threat and willing to fight it but has limited capacity. Before the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat, the US helped train Mauritania's first CT unit, providing personal kit equipment. After the coup and the Tourine attack, the coup regime expanded its counter-terrorism efforts by creating three designated Special Intervention Units (Groupement Special d'Intervention), also known as GSIs. GSII , the elite unit created by US Special Operations, is

the best trained CT unit and, after the Tourine attack, has been deployed in multiple practical exercises. GSI2 was a peace-keeping unit that received ACOTA training. GSI3, formerly known as FUMA, is an infantry unit that participated in various Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCETS). The Mauritanians have extremely limited air and maritime capacity although they did increase those capabilities in the past year through the delivery of two helicopters from Morocco.

¶15. (C) Law Enforcement and Justice: The Leggett murder showed Mauritanians' eagerness to cooperate but also exposed weak forensics, crime scene investigation and case management techniques. As a result, broad avenues of cooperation have been identified to build law enforcement capacity to capture and successfully prosecute extremists.

DESIRED END-STATES

¶16. (C) Integration: Over the course of the conference, we looked out five years to a point where the three key elements of counter-terrorism -- intelligence, military, and law enforcement -- work together well to avert most, terrorist plans before they can be launched, interdict terrorist groups before they can strike, effectively investigate terrorist attacks when they do happen, and successfully prosecute and convict terrorists when they are detained. These counter-terrorist goals operate hand-in-hand with our desired counter-extremism goal of effective engagement between the Mauritanian government, civil society, and religious leaders to build upon the peaceful and open tenets of Mauritanian society and create closer ties between disaffected Mauritanian youth and their society.

¶17. (C) Military: Within five years Mauritania will have three capable, trained, and equipped counter-terrorism units -- with effective centralized command-and-control and training facilities -- that benefit from ISR, long-range reconnaissance, and tactical airlift force multipliers.

¶18. (C) Police and Judicial: Within five years Mauritania will develop a cadre of skilled police investigators and prosecutors capable of preparing cases for successful prosecution with full respect for human rights standards. Regional police and prosecutorial staff will have the skills they need to detain a terrorist suspect and/or preserve a crime scene until specialized police units can arrive on scene. Mauritanian police and judicial elements will engage in regular information exchange and training with American counterparts on terrorism and other international criminal concerns.

¶19. (C) Counter Extremism: Within five years Mauritania will have an effective partnership between the government (at the national, provincial and local levels), civil society, and moderate Islamic clergy that ties disaffected youth to their society through: improved standards of Islamic teaching; civic education; life skills development; and greater transparency in government actions. This partnership will also create an effective reintegration program for soon-to-be-released convicted extremists as well as low-level young extremists who cannot be released directly into society but who would only harden in the traditional prison system. All these initiatives will be founded on an common appreciation of the social, economic, and governmental drivers of extremism. potential to go wrong.

ENGAGEMENT AREAS

¶10. (C) Mil-to-Mil: The conference found thinking on mil-to-mil cooperation to already be well advanced. September 1 meetings with Chief of Defense General Ghazwany and Minister of Defense Hamadi Ould Hamadi confirmed strong Mauritanian interest in re-engagement. General Ghazwany

provided key insights into evolving Mauritanian military counter-terrorism strategy (SEPTEL through DAO channels) that informed the discussion. Drawing from the experience of 2007-2008 when the GIRM and Mission struggled to keep up with a rapidly increased military engagement, conferees agreed on the need to keep our future engagement limited to our highest priorities and to emphasize the role of JSOTF - TS as the gateway for engagement proposals going to the Mission.

-- FY09 and FY10 priorities: Top mil-to-mil priorities are to train and equip military counter-terrorism units GSII and GSIII (former GLATR and FUMA) and to refurbish the Salahdin forward operating base (FOB) as requested by Chief of Defense General Ghazouani in a recent meeting with Ambassador, DATT and AFRICOM representatives. The GSII and GSIII are currently Mauritania's leading counter-terrorism units. The Salahdin FOB -- close to the Malian border -- would allow the military to establish rotary wing capacity for intervening forces and would give Mauritarians forward based Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to monitor movement in the desert. Post is seeking permission to conduct an assessment of the GSIs as well as the airstrip before the end of September to benefit from some possible FY-09 funding. As GSI 1 and 2 have been actively deployed over the last year, training modules will need to be customized to reflect their own identified requirements. We would look to the French or other partners to train and equip the less developed GSI 2 currently based in Atar. As we look past FY-2010, we see the need for a single counter-terrorism training center to provide a common training doctrine for the three GSIs and to allow for a regular replenishment capability as current assigned forces retire or transfer.

-- Full staffing of AFSOC Persistent Element Programs: The Ambassador concurred with the return to pre-coup levels of the SOFLE, CMSE and MIST offices to allow for renewed engagement and sustain current activities. Staffing will increase to 14 American personnel (4 in a combined SOFLE/MLE Office, 5 MIST, 4 CMSE, and 1 Level-III Interpreter). AFSOC will also create two LES positions (one for SOFLE and one for CMSE) within the next two months. Additional part-time LES interpreter positions will be added as activities pick up.

-- In-Country Training: DoD will conduct four JCETS with the GSIs and one with the Air Force. Two of the JCETS will be conducted during Flintlock as part of the Mauritanian-based exercise elements. The Air Force JCET will review future requirements both for tactical airlift (using the existing Basler platform) and rotary wing aircraft.

-- Naval/Coast Guard Engagement: The mission would welcome Navy equipment, maintenance and training support for the Mauritanian Automated Information System (AIS). Coast Guard engagement proved very useful in the past and would be welcome again.

-- Overseas Training and Conferences: Mission supports renewed Mauritanian participation in U.S. seminars and educational programs including MIBOCA, CMI Conferences, FLINTLOCK and related exercises, ACSS, NESA and other programs. The Mission agreed to approach the Mauritians about hosting a Trans-Sahara Security Symposium in the coming year.

-- Equipment: Subject to a needs review with the two GSI target units, Mission will seek renewed funding for a second Basler (the highest priority prior to the coup) and some specialized vehicles (water and tanker trucks) for the GSI 1.

-- Peacekeeping: Based on the continued statement of interest by Chief of Defense General Ghazwany on September 1, Mission would welcome a renewal of the ACOTA peacekeeping training program. Ghazwany indicated Mauritania is still interested in participating in UN peacekeeping operations even though he is aware of no current request for forces from Mauritania. Mission would welcome an ACOTA visit to better define Mauritanian intentions since the units previously designated for peacekeeping were later designated as the third GSI.

-- ISR: Mission welcomed the renewed use of Creeksand in Mauritania. In out years, we will look to the possible supply of small tactical UAVs to the GSIs.

-- USG Air Assets: Mission noted a willingness to host the two STOL aircraft currently based in Ouagadougou should their planned transfer to Bamako not pan out.

¶11. (C) Law Enforcement and Justice: The Mission noted the importance of building Mauritanian police and judicial capabilities as the weakest element in the Intelligence/Military/Police triangle of counter-terrorism capabilities. U.S. engagement with senior Mauritanian police and justice officials following the June AQIM killing of an American citizen in Nouakchott had established a solid foundation for future engagement even as it highlighted the paucity of Mauritanian capabilities. The Mission was pleased to find a significant interagency interest in law enforcement and judicial cooperation both in terms of counter-terrorism but also for counter-narcotics. Mission noted that the new Aziz government has yet to prove its credentials on human rights. Any law enforcement training proposals will include a review of whether such training could be used by the Government for political repression.

-- FY09 and FY10 priorities: In the immediate FY09 horizon, Post will proceed on its existing Border Security Assistance Program through DS-ATA to build the capacity of Mauritanian border patrol units (this program is being done in conjunction with Embassy Bamako).

-- Staffing: INL is reported interested in establishing a cleared PSC position in the Mission to support increased engagement with the Mauritanians. Mission would support such a position. INL is also interested in placing a contractor for six months or more within the Police Academy to identify needs as well as support development of in-service training capability (currently there is virtually no training for police after their basic entry course). Post is prepared to begin negotiation for a Memorandum of Agreement when the Department wishes to proceed.

-- Training: Legatt indicated Mauritania would be invited to join in FBI-sponsored financial forensics training in Morocco in the near future and will be considered for future FBI sponsored training.

-- AFRICOM Activities: Mission indicated its willingness to be included in future AFRICOM counter-narcotics training and programs including Coast Guard and MIST activities.

-- Future activities: Pending confirmation of an INL presence at Post, Mission identified the need for training in basic police skills, evidence collection, case management, prison guard standards, and bomb disposal. LEGATT noted that the Attorney General had indicated some interest in developing a counter-terrorist fusion cell of prosecutors and magistrates. Should that idea advance, this was identified as a possible OPDAT engagement. Renewed focus on the previously-approved OPDAT program in support of the Office of the Inspector General anti-corruption investigations could be considered once the nature of the GIRM's anti-corruption efforts are clearer (i.e. -- to determine whether they are only focused on government opponents).

¶12. (C) Counter-Extremism: Mission highlighted the long-term threat of radicalization as the greater threat to Mauritania than the more immediate and concrete threat posed by AQIM terrorist activities. Previous USAID and PD TSCTP activities were on the verge of commencing when the August 2008 coup negated funding. While PD, MIST and CMSE activities have been able to maintain modest counter-extremism programs over the past year, the re-establishment of the USAID program is needed to anchor all other activities.

-- Survey of existing extremists: Using DoD funding, Post seeks to contract a sociological study of the 60 plus extremists already incarcerated in Mauritania. Such a study would aim to find commonalities in the prisoners' development that would allow us to develop better counter-extremist interventions.

-- FY09 and FY10 priorities: USAID indicated its intention to re-establish the USAID program in Mauritania as part of its four-country TSCTP program. Remaining FY-2009 funds will be used for the design and implementation of a pilot program focused on counter-extremism in the poor districts of Nouakchott. USAID Accra will determine the oversight mechanisms for this pilot program. In FY10, USAID is looking forward to re-establishing an office in Mauritania and bringing an expert to manage programs and play an advocacy role with other international organizations. Pending selection of an implementing partner, the USAID program will initially focus on Prevention by developing effective interventions with vulnerable youth in the ideologically charged region between Nouakchott and Kiffa. Subsequently, the Conference discussed the need to expand the program to include Reintegration activities. Post is prepared to begin negotiation of a new Limited Scope Agreement with the GIRM covering this and other USAID activities once the draft is forwarded by USAID Accra.

-- AFRICOM Activities: MIST will launch a pilot anti-extremism program in Aleg this September that effectively pulls together local elected officials (the driving force), civil society, and Islamic clergy to reach out to vulnerable youth through sports, culture, and discussion groups. The pilot will be replicated in Zouerate and Nema using FY-2009 funding and to other "frontier" towns with FY 2010 funding. Other initiatives to support moderate Islamic voices will continue in Nouakchott. As the GIRM develops its counter-extremism strategy, the MIST will stand ready to provide technical assistance and support public outreach activities. CMSE, in addition to completing existing projects, will focus construction, MEDCAP, and humanitarian assistance efforts in the frontier town band running from Zouerate to Nema. Particular attention will go to towns where future mil-to-mil training may take place in an ongoing fashion.

-- Public Diplomacy: PD will continue to coordinate its activities with USAID and DOD to enhance counter-extremism efforts (in addition to other PD priorities). Expansion of American Corners, the ACCESS microscholarship program, support to the alumni association, and judicious use of visiting American Muslims are ongoing activities PD has in place. PD will develop proposals to use MEPI funds for greater Muslim outreach activities. Should ESF funds become available in FY-2010, PD will develop a specific TSCTP proposal to support counter-extremism.

¶13. (C) Management Considerations: Mission noted that it was better placed than in 2007 to manage an increased counter-terrorism engagement with Mauritania. Both ICASS and Program staff levels have increased as has the Mission's overall reporting capacity. The previous 2007-2008 experience identified potential pitfalls in the area of ICASS services, space, and local personnel that will be addressed this time.

-- ICASS: AFRICOM and management staff resolved questions related to outstanding FY-09 issues and agreed to the framework for the future. This followed on the August visit to Stuttgart of Post's Financial Management leadership that clarified a number of issues related to the financial management of AFRICOM accounts.

-- Temporary CAA Building: Mission reiterated its interest in moving forward in basing a DOD-procured containerized CAA office on the compound to accommodate SOCAFRIKA SOFLE and MLE personnel as well as liaison elements for future JCETS and JPATS. Mission will work with Department (OBO, DS and IRM)

and AFRICOM to facilitate acquisition and installation of the building as soon as possible.

-- NSDD 38 cases: Mission noted that existing NSDD 38 authority exists to re-establish the USAID TSCTP position (as well as two LES staff). Mission provides "in principle" concurrence for establishing INL positions at Post once all ICASS and related issues are resolved.

-- Force Protection: Ambassador, DCM, A/RSO, DATT, SOFLE and AFRICOM personnel reached agreement on general guidelines for force protection of SOCAFRICA persistent element personnel when traveling outside of Nouakchott. These guidelines respect Chief of Mission authority, provide reasonable security for these forces, and maintain the standard of equal security for all USG personnel assigned to Post. Case-by-case changes in the guidelines are allowable based on current threat reporting at the time. Elements of these guidelines regarding carry of weapons are subject to Mauritanian military concurrence. SOCAFRICA agreed that regionally-based air assets would be made available whenever possible to support travel to the more remote areas of Mauritania.

BOULWARE